**As A Leader, Political Savvy Is NOT About Being Political**

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BY [ROBERT DENKER](https://www.rdpusa.com/author/robert-denker/)

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The concept of “organizational politics” often conveys behavior that, at its best, is unsavory and, at it’s worst, is unprincipled, unethical and lacking trust.

However, “political” behavior is, by definition, neither positive nor negative.

The “goodness” or “badness” of political behaviors resides not in the wielding of influence itself but in the means used and the objectives obtained.

Clearly organizations are a complex labyrinth of egos, issues, rivalries, sacred cows and personal sandboxes.

Leaders who are “politically savvy” accept these facts and deal with them.

To them these are everyday elements of “organizational life”.

As such, they are able to influence successfully within and outside of their direct area of responsibility, understand the underlying issues and context, the personalities involved, and get things done in this labyrinth with the least amount of disruption for maximum benefit.

In short, they are “politically savvy.”

Being politically savvy is a key competency to success at the senior leadership levels and those who do this well more often then not, do the following:

**As you read through the list below take note of where you rate yourself – 1 (low) to 5 (high) – on each of the following for statements**

* You’re able to analyze the situation or context
* You’re capable of building partnerships and alliances
* You’re able to keep conflict to a minimum
* You’re able to build a strong reputation

**A Closer Look at Being Politically Savvy**

**Able to Analyze the Situation or Context**

Politically savvy leaders understand the organizational culture, each group’s roles and responsibilities, and know who the key influencers are in each area.

Those that do this well can answer the following questions skillfully about their organization.

**What is the image and reputation your organization hopes to project?**

* What is the history of the organization?
* From where has it come?
* What are the most important core values?
* What business models, ways of doing business, organizational schemes, etc. are central to its success?

**What behaviors are considered acceptable within the organization?**

* When do employees arrive and leave work?
* Is humor a part of the workplace?
* How are those in powerful positions addressed and treated?

**Who has influence in the organization?**

Remember that organizational influence comes from many sources: title and direct authority, credibility, expertise, or a long history within the organization.

**Who are your key stakeholders?**

These are the folks you need to help you be successful and are usually your peers.

* What contribution do they make?
* Who are the key influencers in each of these groups?
* How can your group help them or contribute to their success?

**Capable of Building Partnerships and Alliances**



Politically savvy leaders [effectively build alliances](https://www.rdpusa.com/individual-performers-prepared-work-as-team) within the organization to help them achieve their objectives.

Those that do this well can answer the following questions skillfully about their partnerships and alliances.

* On your key projects/objectives do you include people who share mutual or complimentary needs to attend your meetings?
* Do you on a regular basis set up short meetings with the people or groups you have identified as your key stakeholders and discuss ways you might be able to help each other be more effective?
* Do you follow up by maintaining contact after these meetings?

**Keep Conflict to a Minimum**

Politically savvy leaders effectively keep conflicts small and concrete.

They are skilled at separating people from the problem by looking at the nature of the problem, not the person presenting the problem.

**Those that do this well can answer the following questions skillfully about their ability to keep conflict to a minimum.**

* Do you actively support your allies? Remember that you need to give something in order to get something in return, now or in the future.  Show loyalty, help them with their needs and keep your promises.
* Do you try to win over your adversaries by considering their interests and giving something to them when possible?
* Do you try not to insult others or cause harm? If you have done so inadvertently, do you make amends promptly?
* Do you give praise or credit when it’s due – to friend and foe alike?
* Do you practice compromise and win-win negotiation? Remember, you’ll likely need to negotiate again with this person in the future.

**Build a Strong Reputation**

Politically savvy leaders effectively develop and nurture their [influence and reputation](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201004/the-value-good-reputation) in order to be politically effective in the organization.

**Those that do this well can answer the following questions skillfully.**

* Are you able to create a positive impression by acting in predictably honorable and ethical ways?
* Do you deliver that which you promise and do not promise that which you cannot deliver?
* Do you highlight your group’s successes and others who collaborated with you many more times then you promote your accomplishments? (Remember: Leadership is about making others successful)
* Do you work to gain the trust of people who can provide information or support important to your success?
* Do you avoid behaviors that could jeopardize others’ opinions of you?  Be above reproach in your personal conduct by behaving at work as you would in your place of worship.
* Are you respectful and genuine with everyone? Treating entry-level employees or assistants in the same way that you would treat the president?

**The Bottom Line**

In conclusion, being politically savvy is learnable.

It begins by accepting that organizations represent both the best and the worst of the human condition.

Having said this, you can increase your effectiveness by taking the time to actively answer the sets of questions outlined above and work hard on those areas you identified for yourself as weaknesses to become politically savvy and foster a better work environment and organizational outcomes.

image of Republican and Democrat symbols: [SF Weekly](http://blogs.sfweekly.com/thesnitch/2012/03/democrats_99designs_republicans.php)
image of climbers: [anthemvp.com](http://www.anthemvp.com/)

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